

ONWARD AND UPWARD

Paid Leave Victories from 2020 to Today

May 2026



**PAID
LEAVE
for ALL**

a better  balance



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Since the beginning of 2020, the paid leave movement has won victory after victory, delivering real leave to workers now while continuing the momentum toward the universal federal guarantee we need. In this time frame, **42 states and the District of Columbia** have expanded leave rights to workers in their states, joined by local and federal wins that increased leave rights. This report lifts up those victories. These triumphs are milestones marking the path to paid leave for all and the work remaining to deliver for all working people.





SETTING THE STAGE

THE FIRST NATIONAL PAID LEAVE LAW & BUILD BACK BETTER

In 2019, those leading the fight to pass paid leave in the United States launched a campaign that takes our name from our mission: Paid Leave for All.¹ Together, we are dozens of organizations representing millions of people from across the country, bridging workers' and women's rights, labor and small business, disability advocates and military family groups.

Shortly thereafter, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic changed our nation's understanding of the importance and the urgency of paid leave. As part of the emergency response, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which included the U.S.'s first national paid leave law.² Under FFCRA, eligible employees could take up to two weeks of paid sick leave for certain COVID-related health and quarantine needs, including caring for a loved one with covered needs. Covered employees could take up to 10 additional weeks of paid leave to care for a child whose school was closed or whose child care provider was unavailable because of COVID-19.³ Despite eligibility restrictions that excluded a significant portion of the workforce, FFCRA paid leave powerfully increased workers' ability to take leave when they needed it most.⁴ However, FFCRA leave was temporary⁵ and confined to specific pandemic needs, underscoring the desperate need for lasting universal protections.

In 2021, a permanent, comprehensive paid leave bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives as part of the Build Back Better package.⁶ But when Build Back Better became the Inflation Reduction Act and was signed into law, paid leave was left out.⁷ As a result, despite coming closer than ever before, federal law still does not guarantee the right to paid leave. Instead, advocacy continues to bring paid leave to all those who need it, building brick by brick with state, local, and federal victories that give ever-growing numbers of Americans paid leave they can count on.

NEW STATE PROGRAMS DELIVER PAID LEAVE FOR MILLIONS OF WORKERS

Advocates and policymakers have fought for and won paid leave in states across the country, delivering life-changing benefits to working families.⁸ Since the start of the pandemic, six states have passed new comprehensive paid family and medical leave laws. Collectively, **more than 11.7 million people** are eligible or will soon be eligible for paid leave under these laws.⁹

- In 2020, Colorado became the first state to pass paid leave by ballot initiative, with voters seizing the opportunity to guarantee crucial benefits for themselves and their families. Benefits began in 2024.¹⁰
- A record three new state paid leave programs began providing benefits in 2026, marking a powerful expansion in access:
 - Delaware enacted its paid leave law in 2022 with bipartisan support.¹¹
 - Minnesota brought the first guaranteed paid leave program to the Midwest with their legislative victory in 2023.¹²
 - Maine's 2023 comprehensive paid leave law broke new ground for survivors of violence with its especially inclusive safe leave provisions.¹³
- The next state up is Maryland, where benefits begin January 1, 2028.¹⁴
- Most recently, Virginia became the first state in the South to guarantee paid leave with a 2026 law. Benefits will begin in December 2028.¹⁵

Alongside these newly passed state laws, five other new paid leave programs came online in this period, under which **nearly 9.8 million workers** are eligible for paid leave.¹⁶ Washington State¹⁷ and the District of Columbia¹⁸ launched their programs in 2020, joined by Massachusetts¹⁹ (2021), Connecticut²⁰ (2022), and Oregon²¹ (2023).²² In total, 14 states and the District of Columbia now have comprehensive paid leave laws in place, covering more than one in three private sector workers nationwide.²³

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CONTINUED IMPROVEMENTS KEEP MAKING EXISTING PROGRAMS BETTER

States have also not stopped at their initial legislative wins, instead repeatedly returning to improve and expand their laws. As state paid leave programs provide real-world experience and data-backed lessons on best practices, advocates and their elected allies have made state paid leave programs stronger, more equitable, and more inclusive.

When not all workers could afford to take the leave they earned, states changed their laws to put more money in workers' pockets. California increased wage replacement rates—the percentage of their own paychecks workers receive while on leave—with a 2022 law,²⁴ making the program more accessible for low-wage workers. In 2025, Rhode Island advocates won higher wage replacement, with benefit amounts set to increase in stages starting in 2027.²⁵

Paid leave wins have also delivered more time. Rhode Island passed legislation in 2021²⁶ and again in 2024²⁷ to extend paid family leave, cumulatively doubling the number of available weeks. In the District of Columbia, a 2021 law phased in additional weeks of benefits over time,²⁸ bringing the current total to 12 weeks for serious health and family needs while adding an additional two weeks of designated prenatal leave.²⁹

States have also expanded their programs to cover new needs or better address particular situations. Washington State amended its law to add benefits for bereavement following the death of a worker's child.³⁰ Rhode Island added specific coverage for organ and bone marrow donors,³¹ supporting lifesaving living donor gifts. In 2025, Colorado enacted first-in-the-nation legislation³² providing NICU parents up to an additional 12 weeks of paid leave.³³

Recognizing the need to reflect and protect all families, workers and paid leave advocates have successfully fought to expand the range of loved ones workers can

take leave to care for. Rhode Island³⁴ and New York³⁵ each amended their laws to include care for siblings. In California, SB 590 added coverage for a worker's "designated person," ensuring benefits for those caring for extended or chosen family members.³⁶ Washington State similarly amended its law to ensure coverage for loved ones who count on a worker for care, but with whom the worker may not have a legal or biological relationship.³⁷

Paid leave for all means not only keeping your paycheck, but also ensuring you have a job to come back to. To that end, paid leave states have repeatedly passed laws to expand access to job-protected leave as well as to cash benefits. California passed a law extending job-protected leave under the California Family Rights Act to qualifying employees at employers with five or more employees starting in 2021.³⁸ Under a 2025 law, Washington State is expanding access to job-protected leave, combining increased access for newer and part-time employees with a phased-in extension to smaller employers.³⁹ Most recently, New Jersey passed a law significantly expanding job-protected leave rights.⁴⁰ Starting in July 2026, *all* employees taking New Jersey paid medical leave (TDI) will have the right to get their jobs back, while the New Jersey Family Leave Act will now provide job-protected leave to many more employees taking family leave, adding coverage for many previously excluded newer or part-time employees as well as those at smaller employers.

STATE PAID LEAVE PROGRAMS PROVIDE REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE AND DATA- BACKED LESSONS ON BEST PRACTICES

Many states have also made technical or state-specific improvements, with important implications for inclusivity and accessibility of their programs. In response to an unusual exception in the law, Connecticut amended its law⁴¹ to add coverage for certain school employees.⁴² To ensure equitable access, California passed laws to improve program data collection⁴³ and remove requirements that allowed employers to force employees to use up their accrued vacation before using paid leave.⁴⁴ Because accessing timely documentation is a major barrier to using leave, Washington State changed its laws to make it easier for workers to get the certification they need from health care providers.⁴⁵



STATES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, *including in the South,* ARE RACKING UP VICTORIES FOR EXPANDED LEAVE ACCESS

Progress has not been limited to the 14 states and D.C. that have already passed comprehensive paid leave laws. While work continues toward guaranteed paid leave for all workers, state advocates and champions have been winning meaningful victories in states in every part of the country that expand access and move their states forward toward paid leave for all.

Momentum has been especially robust in guaranteeing new or expanded paid leave rights to state and local government employees, thanks to the work of dedicated state coalitions and their elected champions. Outside of states with comprehensive policies,⁴⁶ **27 states have enacted, expanded, or implemented policies to guarantee paid parental leave to state employees, public educators, or both since the start of 2020.**⁴⁷ These victories deliver meaningful new leave rights to workers who need them, with particular equity implications given the historic importance of public sector

27 STATES HAVE EXPANDED PAID PARENTAL LEAVE RIGHTS FOR PUBLIC WORKERS

WHILE STATES LEAD THE WAY, FEDERAL PROGRESS HAS CONTINUED

jobs for Black workers.⁴⁸ They also raise the profile of the need and can even raise the floor for private sector employers. For instance, after Delaware guaranteed paid parental leave for state employees, the state's largest private sector employer announced a similar benefit, specifically citing the state's policy.⁴⁹ Several states have gone further, such as by covering other caregiving or family needs or returning to the legislatures to add additional weeks of leave. For example, Georgia won paid parental leave for state employees and educators in 2021,⁵⁰ expanded leave length and coverage in 2024,⁵¹ and added additional weeks through a bill passed in 2026.⁵² Similarly, Tennessee passed paid parental leave for state employees in 2023,⁵³ then expanded the program to cover end of life care⁵⁴ and foster care.⁵⁵

Alongside state-level wins, many cities and counties have enacted policies to grant or expand paid leave access for their own employees. Municipalities like Louisville,⁵⁶ Cleveland, and Birmingham⁵⁷ have created new paid parental leave programs for their employees, while others like New Orleans⁵⁸ and Ohio's Cuyahoga County⁵⁹ have expanded existing policies. In 2026 alone, Little Rock, Arkansas⁶⁰ and Lehigh County, Pennsylvania⁶¹ have added new parental leave rights for municipal employees.

Other states have kept up the momentum through moves that pave the way to future progress. In 2025, Vermont expanded rights under its state law providing unpaid, job-protected leave,⁶² including adding coverage for bereavement and needs in relation to domestic and sexual violence and expanding the range of covered loved ones.⁶³ In the same year, Illinois passed a law granting new rights to unpaid, job-protected leave to qualifying NICU parents.⁶⁴

At the same time, advocates and allies have earned important incremental and supportive leave victories at the federal level since the 2021 House passage of paid leave. In 2022, Congress passed the bipartisan Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA), ensuring employees' right to workplace accommodations in relation to pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions.⁶⁵ Under the PWFA, leave can be a covered accommodation.⁶⁶ For example, qualifying workers could receive the accommodation of a period of unpaid leave to recover from childbirth or receive health care in relation to pregnancy.⁶⁷ While the PWFA does not provide a new right to paid leave, the ability to use workers' existing paid leave (such as vacation, sick time, or short-term disability) for a needed leave is also a recognized accommodation under the law.⁶⁸

Paralleling expansions of paid leave rights for state and local government employees, recent years have also seen important victories in federal workers' leave rights. The Federal Employee Paid Leave Act (FEPLA) gives covered federal employees the right to up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave.⁶⁹ Initial benefits began under FEPLA in October 2020.⁷⁰ Since FEPLA's enactment in 2019, the law was expanded to cover more federal employees in 2021⁷¹ and to better account for military service in 2023.⁷² Military servicemembers' leave rights have also expanded, including a 2021 law that substantially increased the duration of leave available to many servicemembers welcoming a new child,⁷³ a 2023 addition of new parental leave rights for covered National Guard and reserve servicemembers,⁷⁴ and 2025 additions of more flexibility in parental leave timing and expanded Coast Guard leave rights.⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

For decades upon decades, advocates and their elected allies across the country have been fighting for paid leave in the United States.⁷⁶ While the road to paid leave for all has been filled with twists and turns, it has also been paved with wins that continue to deliver leave to people when they need it most. Thanks to these hard-won victories, nearly 50 million Americans are now covered by state paid leave laws,⁷⁷ while many more benefit from public sector protections.⁷⁸ Learning from and building on these successes, we can and will deliver paid leave for all working Americans.

**NEARLY
50 MILLION
AMERICANS
ARE NOW COVERED
BY STATE PAID
LEAVE LAWS**



APPENDIX: State Public Sector and Educator Paid Leave Policies

The following states adopted, expanded, or newly implemented paid parental leave policies for state employees and/or public educators in the covered period. Many policies include additional rights, such as caregiving leave.

STATE	CITATION
ALABAMA	Alabama Act No. 2025-81, available at https://arc.sos.state.al.us/cgi/actdetail.mbr/detail?page=act&year=2025&act=81
ARIZONA	Arizona State Personnel System Statewide Policies and Procedures, ASP/HRD-PA6.05, available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/11yNKdFisMiZ6ru3EhTL9-ASbKUpfiswL/view
ARKANSAS*	Arkansas SB 426 (2023), available at https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Bills/Detail?id=sb426&ddBienniumSession=2023%2F2023R
D.C.†	D.C. Law 24-212, District Government Paid Leave Enhancement Amendment Act of 2022, available at https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/laws/24-212
FLORIDA	State of Florida Department of Management Services Division of State Human Resource Management Policy Guideline, HRM #2023-009, available at https://dms-media.ccplatform.net/content/download/161509/file/2023_-_009_Administration_of_Parental_Leave_Benefits_for_State_Personnel_System_Employees_Following_the_Birth_or_Adoption_of_a_Child.pdf
GEORGIA	Georgia House Bill 146 (2021), available at https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/59021 ; Georgia House Bill 1010 (2024), available at https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/66255 ; Georgia House Bill 1118 (2026), available at https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/72672
IDAHO	Idaho Executive Order No. 2020-03, available at https://gov.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/eo-2020-03.pdf
INDIANA	State of Indiana Executive Order 25-34 (2025), available at https://www.in.gov/gov/files/EO-25-34.pdf
IOWA	Iowa HF 889 (2025), available at https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=91&ba=HF889
KANSAS	Kansas Executive Order 21-24 (2021), available at https://sos.ks.gov/publications/Register/Volume-40/Issues/Issue%2028/07-15-21-49285.html
KENTUCKY	101 KAR 2:102 (2025), available at https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/kar/titles/101/002/102/ ; 101 KAR 3:015 (2025), available at https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/kar/titles/101/003/015/
LOUISIANA	Louisiana Executive Order JBE 2023 - 18 (2023), available at https://www.sun0.edu/assets/suno/PDFs/Human-Resources/POLICY---JBE-2023-18-Rules-and-Policies-on-Leave-for-Unclassified-Service.pdf
MICHIGAN	Michigan Civil Service Commission Regulation 2.03 (Oct. 2023), available at https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mdcs/REGS/Reg203.pdf?rev=d69f8c9ba6ff44708e043c1bc464f4bb
MISSISSIPPI	Mississippi House Bill 1063 (2025), available at https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/2025/pdf/history/HB/HB1063.xml
NEVADA	Nevada Assembly Bill 376 (2023), available at https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/82nd2023/Bill/10300/Text
NEW MEXICO	New Mexico Executive Order 2019-036, available at https://www.governor.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Executive-Order-2019-036.pdf
NEW HAMPSHIRE	New Hampshire House Bill 2 (2021), available at https://gc.nh.gov/bill_status/legacy/bs2016/bill_status.aspx?sr=1082&sy=2021&sortoption=&txtsessionyear=2021&txtbillnumber=HB2
NORTH CAROLINA	North Carolina Senate Bill 20 (2023), available at https://ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2023/S20
OKLAHOMA	Oklahoma Senate Bill 16 (2023), available at http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=sb16&Session=231X
OHIO	Ohio House Bill 33 (2023), available at https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/135/hb33
PENNSYLVANIA	Pennsylvania Human Resources Policy, HR-WS003 (Feb. 2024), available at https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/oa/documents/policies/hr/ws003.pdf
SOUTH CAROLINA	South Carolina Senate Bill 11 (2022), available at https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess124_2021-2022/bills/11.htm
SOUTH DAKOTA	South Dakota Senate Bill 186 (2020), available at https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/11794
TENNESSEE	Tennessee Senate Bill 0276 (2023), available at https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default?BillNumber=SB0276&ga=113 ; Tennessee House Bill 0957 (2026), available at https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default?BillNumber=SB0938
TEXAS	Texas Senate Bill 222 (2023), available at https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=SB222
UTAH	Utah Senate Bill 100 (2022), available at https://le.utah.gov/~2022/bills/static/SB0100.html ; Utah House Bill 329 (2026), available at https://le.utah.gov/~2026/bills/static/HB0329.html
VERMONT	State of Vermont, Office of Governor Phil Scott, "Governor Phil Scott Launches Voluntary Paid Family and Medical Leave Program," (Dec. 2022), https://governor.vermont.gov/press-release/governor-phil-scott-launches-voluntary-paid-family-and-medical-leave-program
WYOMING	State of Wyoming Compensation Policy, ALLWYO-AI-HRD-003 (Jan. 2025), available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1b8UYbRVFS6TW5Pvsl6eGatEVMqlZ9pDN/view

Note that many states with comprehensive paid leave programs also cover state employees within their broader laws. For more information on current policies in states across the country, see A Better Balance, "Map of Paid Parental & Family Caregiving Leave Policies for State Employees," <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/map-of-paid-parental-family-caregiving-leave-policies-for-state-employees/>.

* Note that Arkansas's policy only covers eligible female state employees.

† While D.C. has an established paid family and medical leave program for private sector workers, employees of the District are covered separately under this 2022 law.

FOOTNOTES

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- 7 Chantel Boyens et al, "Evolution of Federal Paid Family and Medical Leave Policy," Urban Institute (Nov. 2022), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/evolution-federal-paid-family-and-medical-leave-policy>.
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- 26 Rhode Island Senate Bill 688 Sub A (2021), available at <https://legiscan.com/RI/text/S0688/id/2421467>.
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- 39 2025 Laws of Washington, Ch. 304, available at <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1213-S2.SL.pdf?q=20260501112543>.
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